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Gendered Effects on the Child Welfare Agency Decision-Making Process

Gendered Effects on the Child Welfare Agency Decision-Making Process

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

By

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McMurry University
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, 2007

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University of Arkansas

Abstract

Previous research on child abuse and neglect suggests that there may be gendered relationships between child victims and case outcomes. Specifically, although agency practices may generally regard most male and female children as equally vulnerable, agency attributions regarding the culpability, need, and suitability of parents may be highly differentiated based on gender. Explanations for this pattern may lie in the cultural ideologies and organizational beliefs that distinguish between the perceived rights, responsibilities, and relative importance of mothering and fathering roles. That is, one function of social service agencies is to uphold social constructions of parenting and promote our larger cultural portrayals as to how a mother or father “should” behave and view their roles as parents. These gendered practices in child abuse and neglect cases can have serious consequences, particularly in circumstances where an agency interacts with both parents or must make decisions between parents, such as in determinations of appropriate custodial placement of children.

The current project investigates the role of gender, perpetrator responsibility, and service-related outcomes. Using data collected by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) for the year 2006, we examine forms of interventions, and case outcomes based on types of maltreatment and the gender of the abuser. In doing so, I empirically explore many questions regarding the possible gendered practices associated with child abuse and neglect investigation decision-making, including: 1) Under what individual and perpetrator circumstances are women or men more likely to be successful in the retention of their children?, and 2) How do factors such as type of abuse or neglect and perpetrator interact to affect placement preferences and services provided to fathers versus mothers?

This thesis is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late grandmother, Kay B. Boyle. She was the reason I moved here. Without her, this thesis, this degree, and any future accolades would not have been possible. I am grateful not just for the opportunity to go back to school, but more so for the incredible time I got to spend with her during her last year and a half. I would not trade the time spent and memories made while caring for her for anything (“Now get me my damn pudding!”).

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Background	2
Literature Review	3
Theoretical Framework.....	3
Gender and Deviance.....	7
Gender and Parenting	7
Gender and the Criminal Justice System	11
Research Questions.....	14
Research Question 1	14
Research Question 2	15
Research Question 3	16
Data and Methods.....	17
Independent Variables.....	21
Dependent Variables.....	22
Analytical Strategy.....	23
Results	25
Frequencies	25
Correlations	27
Research Question 1	29
Research Question 2	32
Research Question 3	36

Discussion.....	43
Research Question 1	44
Research Question 2	44
Research Question 3	45
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research.....	48
Conclusion	51
Refereces	54
Appendix.....	57

Introduction

In 2006, nearly 3.6 million children (48 of every 1,000) were the subject of a child maltreatment investigation by state child welfare agencies; abuse was confirmed in a quarter of these investigations. Among substantiated cases, approximately 26% of children were removed from the home, while 38% percent received some type of post-investigative services. While across states there is some general consensus regarding these maltreatment categories, definitions of what constitutes each form of maltreatment, and subsequently the appropriate responses, varies significantly. Child protection laws are locally enforced (as opposed to federally), meaning states have considerable leeway in establishing their own laws and sanctions regulating how families raise their children. The Administration for Children and Families lists five specific types of child maltreatment: neglect, physical abuse, medical neglect, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse/emotional abuse.

The goal of my research is to examine the relationships between perpetrator sex, type of maltreatment, and agency responses to child maltreatment cases. Using data collected by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) for the year 2006, my study examines differences in the forms of interventions provided, types/number of services offered, and child removal likelihood based on types of maltreatment and perpetrator gender. In doing so, the study empirically explores many questions regarding the possible gendered practices associated with child abuse and neglect investigation decision-making, including: 1) Does the type of maltreatment affect agency responses to child maltreatment? 2) Does perpetrator gender affect agency responses to child maltreatment? and 3) Does the interaction of perpetrator gender and maltreatment type affect agency responses to child maltreatment?

Background

There are numerous agencies responsible for the collection of information on child maltreatment and neglect. For example, The Administration for Children and Families, The Children's Bureau, The Child Welfare League of America, and The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect all keep national level data on child maltreatment. This data has primarily been utilized to explore the correlates of child abuse and deleterious effects of abuse on children. In contrast, there is relatively little research on interactions between social service agencies and children's families/guardians. Child welfare organizations are charged with dealing with the family as an institution. Unfortunately, we know little about perpetrator and the agency interactions. Research that looks into the relationship between the gender of the perpetrator and case outcomes appears to be limited at best. Disparities in child maltreatment cases across parent gender may reveal potentially unwarranted biases in social service agency decision-making. Identifying correlations between parent gender and these outcomes is essential for developing and testing theoretical explanations of how child welfare social agencies investigate cases, determine the appropriate courses of action, and administer sanctions.

While there is little research focusing specifically on this area, several similarities between the child welfare social service and the criminal justice systems suggest that theories of gender found in the criminological literature may also be useful for understanding child welfare agencies practices. The majority of child welfare cases do not involve criminal charges, yet they nonetheless share many key features. Much like criminal cases, child welfare cases typically involve an official investigation, pertain to violations of legal codes, and involve some form of formal legal proceedings. Like criminal cases, these proceedings take place within a court-room setting. Furthermore, both types of cases present perpetrators with the threat of formal sanctions.

Thus, much like the criminal justice system, the child welfare social service system operates as a formal mechanism of social control. The child welfare system standardizes the social institution of the family by identifying and responding to violations of socially-proscribed norms of parenting and the care-taking of children. That is, it detects and processes violators of codified rules regarding behavior, thereby enforcing social morality. This implies that theories of how gender significantly impacts outcomes in criminal justice may be applicable for explaining the role of gender in child welfare case outcomes.

The family is a primary site of the emergence of gender relations (Ridgeway 2009; Scourfield 2003; Brewer and Lui 1989; Fiske 1998). Issues of mothering and care-giving permeate public and private discourse. Gender assumptions, both inside and outside the family, affect how people perceive the care-taking roles of mothers and fathers in general (Hare-Mustin 1988; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Cowdery and Knudson-Martin 2005). Thus, there is substantial reason to believe that gender will be exceptionally influential in agency investigations and responses to violations of care-giving norms. The similarities between the child welfare system and criminal justice systems combined with the lack of formal criminal sanctions make the child welfare system a formal entity of “gendered social control” (Scourfield 2003:167).

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The Construction of Gender

In their article West and Zimmerman (1987) look at gender not as a static classification but rather as a social interaction and accomplishment. Their approach transformed the analysis of gender from the study of what a person *is* to the analysis of what a person *does* (Fenstermaker

and West 2002: West and Zimmerman 1987). West and Zimmerman posited that "...gender differences or the sociocultural shaping of 'essential female and male natures,' achieve the status of objective facts" (1987:142). The consequences of "doing gender", according to West and Zimmerman, is the creation social arrangements based on sex categories as normal, natural, and legitimate ways to organize all aspects of social life, including family norms and expectations.

How would gender bear out in social service agency decision-making? One possibility is that "doing gender" creates a social expectation placed upon mothers to act in a caring and nurturing manner to children, especially their own children. West and Zimmerman linked the concept of "doing gender" to the family, suggesting that household labor is designated as "women's work." Thus, women disproportionately perform these responsibilities, exemplifying the mutually exclusiveness of the genders and their related work. While not explicitly stated in their work, the caring for and nurturing of children could be considered an additional component of household labor and therefore a "feminine" task. As a result agencies charged with regulating the family could be argued to be "doing gender" or at the very least enforcing the rules of "doing gender" by the policies they create and the manner in which they carry these policies out.

Similarly, R.W. Connell's (1987) *Gender and Power* challenges the commonly held notion that biological basis of reproduction justifies existing norms regarding gender and sexuality. While Connell does not rule out the existence of some innate differences in temperaments and abilities of the two genders, she does suggest that these differences should not be the foundation that institutions are founded on because these differences exist on a much smaller scale than the commonalities between men and women. Connell argues that while the body is implicated in the processes of gender, it is also implicated in all forms of social practice and should not hold special precedence when it comes to gender. Examples of this can be seen

in cases of child maltreatment, especially those involving neglect, mother's failing to meet the needs of their children are deemed as "unnatural" mothers (Scourfield 2003) which is socially constructed by relying heavily on the body and a mother's biological role in reproduction. The reproductive aspect of women's bodies become heavily focused and influential on family policy, such that the nine month process child-bearing has transcended to a perceived social expectation of lifetime care, and the perceived social "fact" that nurturing of children by mothers is superior to the care men can provide.

Structural Influences of Gender

Building off of Goffman (1967), West and Zimmerman (1987), and Acker (1990), Ridgeway (2009) suggests that individuals categorize themselves and others based on differences in order to help them navigate everyday social interactions. She contends that gender is a primary frame for classification. As a primary frame gender is one of the most influential categorizations used to dictate one's own and analyze other's behaviors. Citing various empirical studies (Brewer and Lui 1989; Fiske 1998; Ridgeway 2006-2007), she notes that widely held cultural beliefs about attributes of these categories are then attached to the group, often referred to as stereotypes. This extreme focus on categorization works to negate any commonalities shared between the two groups. Ridgeway suggests that these "rules of gender" or stereotypes transcend the individual level and "are institutionalized in the media representations, in the images of men and women implied by laws and government policies, and in a variety of taken-for-granted organizational practices" (Ridgeway 2009:150). While these stereotypes are presented as all encompassing representations of the sexes, they are typically inaccurate representations of the members of that group. When applied specifically to child welfare and

family policy, the belief that women are universally better caregivers than men is applied to all situations and in turn may have a significant effect on placement decisions and outcomes.

In the context of social service organization decision-making, the “rules of gender” not only affect formal policy, but can also informally affect the ways in which policies are enforced. Ridgeway found that when it comes to the sanctioning of explicit violations related to gender, women are often sanctioned for acting too aggressive, whereas men are penalized for being too yielding or emotionally weak. The regulation of the institution of family through social service system outcomes is one important area to empirically assess Ridgeway’s claim. If women are expected to be “naturally” nurturing, excessive physical punishment and/or physical abuse perpetrated by a woman could be perceived as being overly domineering and not in line with widely held cultural beliefs and stereotypes about women. These “unnatural” behaviors could more negatively impact character assessments of mothers than fathers, and subsequently result in harsher sanctions than similar actions carried out by a man/father. Thus, consistent with Ridgeway’s ideas, the current study hypothesizes that the likelihood of child removal in physical abuse cases will be greater when women are the primary perpetrators than comparable male primary perpetrator cases because the physical harming of a child is a direct violation of gendered expectations of parents. A mother is expected to nurture and care for her child, making physical abuse perpetrated by a mother an act of double deviance, violating both formal sanctions and expected gendered parental roles.

The proposed study requires review of relevant literature spanning several different categories. All of the literature reviewed had a focus on gender, family roles, deviance, and/or criminal justice outcomes. The literature has been grouped together by area, but due to the presence of multiple themes in the literature, some studies are cited across various sections.

Gender and Deviance

In the criminal justice system, women have lower rates of deviance and these rates stay fairly constant overall, despite fluctuations in rates over time (2000). However, Heidensohn (2000) argues that while cultural shifts with regard to women in the institutions of marriage, family, and the workplace have received much scholarly attention, we know little about women's deviance. Heidensohn suggests that the male-focus of deviance studies has created a framing of deviance that does not aptly apply to women's deviant behaviors. Heidensohn suggests that, rather than trying to explain women's behavior in the context of "traditional" (i.e., male) understandings of deviance, studies that take into consideration the "female sex role" and its relationship to social structures would provide more meaningful and reliable observations. For example, Heidensohn argues that women have been disproportionately affected by the medicalization of deviance; they are more readily defined as "sick" (as opposed to deviant) than men (Heidensohn 1985; 2010).

This idea may also be relevant for child maltreatment cases. The "female sex role" is particularly salient within the family and parenting norms, and may be a critical influence on social services responses to female versus male perpetrators of child maltreatment. While child maltreatment is not typically considered criminal, it is still sanctioned as deviant by formal entities. The willingness of agencies to label violators of cultural norms of parenting as "sick" versus deviant may affect decisions regarding the appropriate agency responses intensity. Should parents be regarded as "sick," as opposed to criminal, agencies may be more likely to determine treatment and/or the provision of services is the appropriate course of action.

Gender and Parenting

Despite some attitudinal shifts in parenting roles, parenting still remains a task that is placed more heavily upon mothers (Muller 1995; McGuffey 2005). Following trends in general gender research, studies on motherhood have taken a dynamic approach, viewing motherhood as a series of interactions that arise within gendered relationships and social institutions (Cowdery and Knudson-Martin 2005).

Researchers in the social sciences have argued against the view of motherhood as a “natural identity.” In a qualitative study of adaptations among contemporary couples amidst constantly changing social and economic contexts, Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) set out to understand motherhood through the lived experiences of both men and women.

All of the couples (n=40) were classified as Postgender (n=12), Gender Legacy (n=22), or Traditional (n=16). When posed with questions about family related tasks and responsibilities, Postgender couples’ responses supported ideas of equality and a move beyond gender as a tool for organizing their relationship. Gender Legacy couples did not explicitly cite gender as the mechanism but appeared to base their decisions on hidden gender-based structures. Traditional couples overtly used gender as the basis for maintaining their division of labor within the family. Findings showed that while Gender Legacy couples did not cite gender explicitly, Gender Legacy and Traditional couple were still heavily influenced by gender when delegating familial tasks and responsibilities (38 to 12).

This work found overwhelming support for the idea that mothering operates as a relational, not internal, process. Mothering is heavily influenced by both partners’ beliefs surrounding mothers’ natural childcare abilities. These beliefs become translated into practice, creating a self- perpetuating cycle, in which parents perpetuate ideological assumptions that

women are better caregivers for children. Interestingly, Cowdery and Knudson-Martin found this phenomenon among both couples that did and did not endorse traditional gender roles (2005). The authors suggest that the idealization of mothers reproduces gendered inequalities within the family. They argue this idealization of mothers and the resulting gendered inequalities must be combated by constant effort against the prevailing discourses on motherhood by both men and women. Their study provide a useful strategy for understanding how gender organizes and structures lives and how intimate relationships are affected by the intersection of equality and meanings of motherhood. While Cowdery and Knudson-Martin focused on effects within the family, this same phenomenon may also exist in formal organizations charged with regulating the family.

Using multiple national datasets, Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2001) examined trends in family attitudes from the 1960's through the 1990's, including the gendered roles of men and women, marriage, and divorce. They found that since the 1960s there were extreme changes in attitudes towards marriage, divorce, childlessness, and especially relevant to this study, gender. Most shifts indicated a move towards more tolerance for behaviors that did not fit with "traditional" norms. Interestingly, while attitudes showed greater acceptance for nontraditional roles, most Americans continued to covet and seek the traditional life course involving marriage and family. Thornton and Young-DeMarco found the most dramatic shifts in attitudes about gender from 1960-1985. Specifically, by the mid 1980s, most Americans held egalitarian views when it came equality among men and women. While some examined trends were not found to be significant or in the right direction, Thornton and Young-DeMarco suggest that the majority of their findings are in support of more egalitarian shifts. Thornton and Young-DeMarco also mention in closing that "...getting married and having children will continue to be important

goals for most Americans” and gender roles within the family will continue to change and adjust which may result in potential conflicts which lends support to further examination of various aspects of gender and parenting roles within the family (2001:1032).

While informative, their study is limited by the lack of statistical significance and consistent findings across trends in family attitudes. Furthermore, it did not include many measures specific to child-rearing, such as disciplinary practices. Also, while Thornton and Young-DeMarco’s study examined attitudes, it did not look into any potential dissonance between attitude and actions. Due to this limitation, the study does not address actual outcomes and only addresses attitudes. With previous studies showing the existence of dissonance between rhetoric and actual beliefs (Cowdery and Knudson-Martin 2005) further examination of actual outcomes would benefit existing research.

Carlson and Knoester (2011) used data from the National Survey of Families and Households to explore how the varying structures of single parent, stepparent, and two-parent biological families might influence the diffusion of gender ideologies from parents to their adult children. Carlson and Knoester found that biological parent’s ideologies are the strongest predictor of their children’s ideologies. In relation to one of the weaknesses mentioned above for Thornton and Young-Demarco’s study (2001), Carlson and Knoester found that “Despite large shifts in gender ideologies in recent years, men and women continue to have significantly different gender ideologies; men continue to favor traditional divisions of labor more than women” (2011:712). While the above research does not directly apply to the proposed study, its focus on gender as well as its findings supporting dissonance between individual’s supposed attitudes towards gender roles and their actual actions makes it relevant to understanding the

current study by lending support to the overarching theme of mothers being traditionally thought of as better primary caregivers than fathers.

Ideological portrayals of women as the best and most appropriate caregivers not only informally construct parenting roles, but are formally influential via family court practices. Family court practices add formal legitimacy to these ideals, as research shows that mothers are more likely than fathers to receive sole or physical custody. This is consistent across in both mutually-agreed custody arraignments and in court-resolved disputes regarding custody (Seltzer 1990; Maccoby and Mnookin 1992; Fox and Kelly 1995). For example, in three different samples from Wisconsin, Santa Clara and Santa Mateo, California and Oakland County Michigan mothers had sole or physical custody in approximately 89% of cases (Seltzer 1990), 67% of cases (Maccoby and Mnookin 1992), and 89% of cases (Fox and Kelly 1995) respectively. Thus, while the magnitude of this disparity may vary across samples, there is nonetheless a clear and significant disproportionality in placement, wherein mothers become the predominant custodial caregivers.

Gender and the Criminal Justice System

While child abuse cases are typically not dealt with in a criminal court, they do share many similarities with criminal proceedings. A great deal of criminological scholarship investigates issues of gender and official decision-making (Lise 2005; Moulds 1978; Doerner and Demuth 2009; Daly 1987, 1987, 1989; Steffensmeier, Karmer, and Streifel 1993; Bickle & Peterson 1991; Spohn 2000, 2002). Many of the concepts and findings in gender and criminal justice research may indeed be relevant for understanding how agencies make decisions with regard to child maltreatment. Like criminal offending, female offending in child maltreatment cases challenges traditional gendered expectations. This may be particularly the case with regard

to social services systems, as child maltreatment arguably contradicts what these institutions might hold as "... the source of women's most fundamental identity; that of a mother" (Hare-Mustin 1988:36). Currently, we do not know if gender disparities exist among agencies' decisions concerning perpetrators of child maltreatment. Gender may play an important role in how agencies interpret these violations, make attributions regarding perpetrators, and subsequently determine the appropriate course of action.

Differential treatment of women in the criminal justice system is frequently explained by the concepts of chivalry and paternalism. Chivalry circumstances are characterized as situations in which the "victim or observers of female violators are unwilling to take action against the offender, because she is a woman" (Reckless and Kay 1967:16) and provides us with model behaviors to assist in defining male and female relationships. Paternalism is a term used to refer to the dominate concern for the protection of children. Three basic principles underlie this concept: the defenselessness and lack of property of a child, the lack of full awareness and need for direction, and finally the perceived ignorance of a child which leads to easily being deceived in a way to serve adults without the child's awareness. "First, since a 'child' is defenseless and lacks property, he requires assistance and support, Second, since a 'child' is not fully aware of his role and therefore not fully responsible, he requires guidance... The third idea holds that since a 'child' is ignorant, he can be deceived, or treated in such a way as to serve the interests of the 'adult' without becoming aware of this" (Sills 1968:472). While primarily concerned with protecting children, paternalism may also explain differential treatment of women because it frequently encourages the protection of mothers, as they are viewed as the primary and most capable caretakers of children and therefore in need of protection too. (Moulds 1978).

Research on these ideas has yielded mixed results. With regard to the chivalry hypothesis, several authors have found that women are dealt with more leniently and often receive little or no jail time (Bickle and Peterson 1991; Spohn 2000, 2002). For example, early research by Moulds (1978) found that women were treated more leniently than male counterparts across all levels of the criminal justice system. Conversely, Lise (2005) found that women were at risk of being penalized more harshly. She explains this finding based on attributions of “double deviance,” the idea that women offenders have broken not only formal laws but traditional gender norms as well. Notably, however, Lise also cited evidence supporting the idea that women are more likely to be cautioned (informally reprimanded) by officials, but may be less likely to be formally charged. Still other studies have argued that the effects of gender are conditioned by joint effects of race/ethnicity and age (Doerner and Demuth 2010; Lise 2005).

Research on paternalism in the criminal justice system has found support for leniency for women based on family influences (Daly 1987; 1988; 1989; Steffensmeier, Kramer, and Streifel 1993). Daly (1987; 1988; 1989) found that paternal influence was not solely limited to familial women (i.e., married and/or mothers), but applied to male parents as well, although to a lesser extent. Familial women generally received more leniency than similarly-situated familial men. Specifically, married men without children received little leniency compared to married men with children, while married women received comparable leniency with or without children. Non-familial women and men received the least leniency. Daly found that single fathers were treated similarly to familial women, supporting the idea that justice outcomes may be guided by the paternalistic concern for children.

Daly (1987) found that officials reported that they were reluctant to jail women with children. They also believed that women had higher potential for reform. In addition, judges felt

that women were subject to more informal social control. Their perceptions of increased informal social controls regarding women made them deem formal controls less necessary, believing women could be rehabilitated absent of any incarceration.

While there are many similarities between criminal and child maltreatment case processes, the child victim component of maltreatment cases provides significant contrast to criminal cases. That is, by definition child maltreatment directly contradicts paternalistic objectives. The paternalistic ideals that may have protected women in the criminal justice system may adversely affect female perpetrators in these cases, as these women have failed to uphold their responsibility as caretaker of children. This could be particularly so in multiple maltreatment circumstances, such as in cases where mothers have not only been found to insufficiently meet their child's needs (neglect) but to physically harm (physical abuse) their child as well.

Research Questions

As discussed previously, many studies pertaining to perpetrator gender and case outcomes in the criminal justice system have been done. Despite the many similarities between child welfare cases and criminal justice cases, it appears as though similar research on correlations between outcomes and perpetrator gender in child maltreatment cases is lacking. Expanding this knowledge base, my study focuses on the potential main effect and interaction effect of gender and maltreatment types on child welfare agency interventions. To this end, the current study addresses the three following research questions:

Research Question 1

1.) Does the type of maltreatment affect agency responses to child maltreatment?

Consistent with prior research on criminal justice decision-making, it stands to reason that, regardless of perpetrator, the type of case will affect child welfare agency response. That is, agencies will be both more likely to take action and more likely take more substantial action in the event of more serious offenses (such as in cases where physical injury may be present or there are multiple types of abuse). If case severity affects decisions to remove a child from the home, then perpetrators of physical abuse should be the most likely to receive some form of intervention. However, this will vary greatly depending upon the severity of the neglect or physical abuse. In other words there will be some cases in which the neglect is so serious that they are more likely to receive services than more mild or moderate physical abuse cases. It can be likewise surmised that perpetrators of physical abuse are more likely than perpetrators of neglect to have their child removed, regardless of whether or not services are offered. Also, in cases where services are rendered, perpetrators of physical abuse will be the most likely to have their children removed while being rendered services. As mentioned for previous hypotheses, the severity of the offense may result in opposite findings. Based on this, I make the following predictions:

H1a: Perpetrators of physical abuse will be more likely than perpetrators of neglect to receive some form of intervention as opposed to no intervention.

H1b: Regardless of whether or not services are offered, perpetrators of physical abuse are more likely to have their child removed than perpetrators of neglect.

H1c: If services are rendered, perpetrators of physical abuse are still more likely than perpetrators of neglect to have their child removed than to maintain custody while being rendered services.

Research Question 2

2.) Does perpetrator gender affect agency responses to child maltreatment?

Gender assumptions, both inside and outside the family, affect how people perceive the care-taking roles of mothers and fathers in general (Hare-Mustin 1988; Thornton and Young-

DeMarco 2001; Cowdery and Knudson-Martin 2005). Thus, there is substantial reason to believe that gender will be exceptionally influential in agency responses to violations of caregiving norms. Collectively, the literature suggests that mothers are viewed as the primary, natural, and best-suited caregivers and therefore will be treated as such by the child welfare agencies. This may affect outcomes in several ways. For this study it is suggested that because mothers are viewed as “natural” caregivers they will be held to a higher standard and therefore will generally be the most likely to be subject to some form of intervention child welfare agencies. Due to these high standards, regardless of whether or not services are offered, mothers will be the most likely to have their child removed. I also suggest that when services are offered, mothers will be more likely than fathers to have their child removed while being rendered services. Based on this, I make the following predictions:

H2a: Overall, mothers will be more likely than fathers to receive some form of intervention from child welfare agencies as opposed to no intervention.

H2b: Regardless of whether or not services are offered, mother perpetrators are more likely than father perpetrators to have their child removed.

H2c: If services are rendered, mother perpetrators are still more likely than father perpetrators to have their children removed than to maintain custody while being rendered services.

Research Question 3

3.) Does the interaction of perpetrator gender and maltreatment type affect agency responses to child maltreatment?

Based on previously mentioned attributions of “double deviance,” in the criminal justice system and the idea that women offenders sometimes suffer more severe consequences when they break not only formal laws but traditional gender norms as well (Lise 2005) there is reason to believe that the interaction of maltreatment type and perpetrator gender may influence agency interventions. For this study it is suggested that physical abuse of a child will be seen as more

deviant due to its direct contradiction of widely held gendered beliefs of family roles. While neglect by a mother is likely seen as a deficiency in fulfilling expected gendered family roles, physical abuse of a child is likely seen as a direct contradiction and violation of expected gendered family roles and therefore constituting it as an act of “double deviance” resulting in it being viewed as more severe. Based on this idea of double deviance, mother perpetrators of physical abuse are the most likely to be subject to some form of intervention from child welfare agencies then all other perpetrators. Additionally, mother perpetrators of physical abuse are the most likely of any perpetrators to have their child removed regardless of whether or not services are offered. Mother perpetrators of physical abuse are also the most likely of any perpetrators to have their child removed, while being rendered services. Based on this I suggest the following hypotheses:

H3a: Among all perpetrators, mother perpetrators of physical abuse will be most likely to be subject to some form of intervention as opposed to no intervention.

H3b: Regardless of whether or not services are offered, mother perpetrators of physical abuse will be the most likely of any perpetrator to have their child removed.

H3c: If services are rendered, mother perpetrators of physical abuse are still the most likely of any perpetrator to have their child removed than to maintain custody while being rendered services.

Data and Methods

The current study uses data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Child File, FFY 2006. These data were provided by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect at Cornell University, and have been used with permission. The data were originally collected under the auspices of the Children’s Bureau. Funding was provided by the Children’s Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for

Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The data collection agency, the funding agency, NDACAN, Cornell University, and the agents or employees of these institutions bear no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. The information and opinions expressed reflect solely the opinions of the authors (National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System [Dataset] 2008:iii).

The NCANDS is comprised of child specific data from every maltreatment case reported to state-level child protection agencies. The NCANDS is designed as a child abuse and neglect reporting system that was created by Section 6 of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). The data collection is funded with the intention of empirically tracking the number and nature of child maltreatment reports and functions as the primary source of national information on abused and neglected children reported to State child protective services agencies. Data consist of a Child File which is the case-level component and a State-Level component which is known as the Agency File. The current study is only concerned the case-level Child File. All data contained in these data sets are voluntarily submitted by each state. To ensure the uniformity of the data, each state is responsible for mapping the data to comply with the NCANDS data structure.

Data was collected for the federal fiscal year 2006 (October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006). The unit of observation used by the NCANDS Child File is referred to as the report-child pair. The units of observation are referred to as report-child pairs because each individual report in the Child File can be referenced to two separate identification variables, the report ID (RPTID) and the child ID (CHID). If multiple children exist on a report, each child on the report is delegated the same unique Report ID. Conversely, if a child appears in multiple reports, each report that contains that child will have the Child ID associated with that child. Due to the

repetitiveness and non-exclusivity of these variables only cases with one child reported as a victim were used for this study. Despite this step reducing the overall number of cases, then selected sample still provides a statistically powerful n, as well as a more straightforward process for recoding and analyses.

The overall data set includes a total of 3,477,998 report-child pairs collected from forty-nine states, with Maryland not submitting data. Some of the elements included in the NCANDS Child File are child demographics, which include victims and non-victims, perpetrators, types of maltreatment, investigations or assessment dispositions, risk factors, and services provided as a result of the investigation or assessment. All investigations which are received by the state and issued a disposition are included in the data set. Most states use a two-level system of either “substantiated” or “unsubstantiated,” however, some states use a three-tier system which includes a third disposition of “indicated.” This disposition is recorded when the agency believes there is evidence to suggest that some form of maltreatment took place but there is not enough evidence to substantiate the maltreatment based upon state specific statutes.

Furthermore, some states have unique systems that do not fit into two or three tier disposition systems. NCANDS has created two additional dispositions of “Alternative Response-Victim” and “Alternative Response-Nonvictim” to accommodate these few states. For methodological purposes NCANDS has dictated that dispositions of Substantiated, Indicated, and/or Alternative Response-Victim should be considered cases where maltreatment has occurred.

Each report may contain up to four different allegations of maltreatment. The allegations of maltreatment are not assigned in any prescribed order. Individual allegations of maltreatment are given dispositions in addition to an overall disposition that applies to all children in the report. The overall disposition supersedes all individual maltreatment dispositions. For

example, in a report with three alleged victims, if only one of the alleged maltreatments is substantiated, all three cases are nonetheless given an overall disposition of substantiated. In order for any case to receive an overall disposition of “unsubstantiated”, all alleged maltreatments against all of the children on the report must be given a disposition of “unsubstantiated”.

Due to the expansiveness of the NCANDS FFY 2006 Child File and the specificity of the current study, various steps have been taken resulting in a smaller but still statistically powerful n comprised of only relevant cases. After all recoding was completed this study has an n of 23,278. The current study is only concerned with outcomes and services rendered following a substantiated maltreatment claim, therefore any cases involving a child death were removed. Additionally, to eliminate discrepancies in state reporting of dispositions only cases with a disposition of substantiated were selected. While NCANDS suggests that Substantiated, Indicated, and/or Alternative Response-Victim dispositions all suggest that some type of maltreatment took place, only cases with a disposition of substantiated are certain to have met the state’s child welfare agencies burden of proof and provide a consistent starting point for analysis. The current study is also only concerned with cases involving neglect and/or physical abuse. To ensure the relevancy of included cases, only cases that involved neglect or physical abuse were selected. Any cases involving any other form of abuse (emotional abuse, sexual abuse, etc...) were removed even if physical abuse or neglect were involved to ensure other forms of reported abuse did not influence findings.

Also, in order to aid in coding and make relationships more clear, only cases involving a biological, single parent household in which the biological parent of the household was listed as the sole perpetrator were used. This was done to ensure that the presence of only one abuser and

ensure that outcomes are not confounded by unknown characteristics or actions of a possible non-offending parent. Whether or not the child was removed was used as a dependent variable for some models. It may be reasoned that the presence of two perpetrators or the presence of a non-offending parent who could be seen as a “protector” of the child could have influence the likelihood of a removal therefore by limiting cases to only those with one parents any questions about this relationship were eliminated. Also, to control for the possibility that a non-biological parent may be treated differently than a biological parent, only those cases including biological parents were included.

Independent Variables

To address the specific issues relevant to current project required substantial recoding and construction of variables. To facilitate interpretation, any of the variables that were originally dichotomously-coded (with 1= yes and 2=no) were recoded to binary (0/1) variables¹. Also, although the codebook indicated that missing/unknown variables were indicated by a 9, a substantial number of cases were nonetheless coded as 0. To correct for this large number of likely miscoded cases (as 0 is undefined in the codebook), cases coded as “9” were recorded as 0 in the recoded variables. Like the “2”s in the original variables, I assumed these cases also indicate a lack of presence.

The type of alleged maltreatments were recoded into a series of dummy variables to indicate either Physical Abuse Only (Physical Abuse=1) or Neglect Only (Neglect=1)². I also created a binary variable Mother Perpetrator (1=signifies that the perpetrator was the mother,

¹ Child is White and Perpetrator is White

² Original variables of Child Maltreatment Type 1-4

with father perpetrator as the reference category)³. I also created mean-centered variables of the child's age and the perpetrator's age. These controls were included in all the final models. The child's gender was recoded into a binary variable (with 1=male). Both child and perpetrator race/ethnicity are measured as dummy variables, where Nonwhite=0 and White=1.

Dependent Variables

Based on the original data, I created three dependent variables indicating different agency responses to substantiated maltreatment. First, only 47.2% of substantiated cases in this data set received some form of intervention from a child welfare agency. While the abuse was substantiated, it was not severe enough to warrant agency involvement beyond the investigation. Based on this, I created a binary variable Action Taken (with 1=some agency response, 0=Lack of any action)⁴. Specifically, if there was no removal, post investigation services, family support services, family preservation services, foster care, adoption services, case management services, counseling services, daycare services, educational services, health services, home-based services, housing services, substance abuse services, or any other services an indicator of 0 was assigned. If the case did have at least one of these services it was assigned an indicator of 1. The lack of some form of intervention shows minimal intervention from the child welfare agency.

Second, I wanted to create a variable "Removed" to examine the likelihood of removal, independent of whether or not services were rendered. For any case that had a removal date identified in the data set⁵ an indicator of 1 was given to signify a removal took place. Any case that lacked a removal date was given an indicator of 0. Regardless of whether or not services

³ Originally variable Perpetrator 1 Sex

⁴ Variable Label AnyAction

⁵ Original variable Removal Date

are offered, a removal indicates a moderate to severe reaction from a child welfare agency to the substantiated maltreatment.

Third, in order to further examine removals and services, I created a dichotomous variable “Removal and Services” to examine the likelihood of removal in only cases where services were also being rendered.⁶ To create this variable any case where a removal took place and there was some form of service rendered an indicator of 1 was given. Any case where services were rendered but custody was maintained by the perpetrator was coded as 0. This variable allows for further comparison between cases receiving services while maintaining custody of a child versus services without custody of a child, which for the purpose of this study has been assumed to be a more intrusive response to the substantiated maltreatment.

Analytical Strategy

Preliminary analyses included examination of frequencies and correlation of all variables. Frequencies were run on all control variables pertaining to both perpetrators and victims, types of maltreatment, and agency responses and interventions to the substantiated maltreatments. This facilitated data cleaning and recoding and the identification of missing cases. In addition to running frequencies for all of the variables, correlations were run for all variables included in the models presented. Results indicated there were no problematic issues pertaining to multicollinearity.

To test each hypothesis, I ran logistic regression models, estimating the probability of occurrence for each dependent variable. Coefficients for each variable significant in the model were converted (first to odds, and later to predicted probabilities) to aid in interpretation. The constant for all three models were both dad perpetrators and neglect cases. All models utilized a

⁶ Variable Label RemServ

pairwise approach.

Hypotheses H1a, H2a, and H3a were tested using the dependent variable “Action Taken” as these hypotheses pertain to the likelihood of any intervention or service provision following a substantiated investigation).⁷ The same logistic regression model was used to test all three hypotheses. The model was constructed of three independent variables: Physical Abuse, Mother Perpetrator, and Mother Perpetrator of Physical Abuse.⁸ In addition to measures of interest, models also controlled for the following measures: Child is Previous Victim, Child Sex, Child is White, Child Mean-Centered Age, Perpetrator is White and Perpetrator Mean-Centered Age.⁹

Hypotheses H1b, H2b, and H3b were tested with the dependent variable Removed, as they pertain to the likelihood of removal regardless of whether or not services are offered. The same logistic regression model was used to test all three hypotheses. The model was constructed of three independent variables: Physical Abuse, Mother Perpetrator, and Mother Perpetrator of Physical Abuse.¹⁰ In addition to measures of interest, models also controlled for the following measures: Child is Previous Victim, Child Sex, Child is White, Child Mean-Centered Age, Perpetrator is White and Perpetrator Mean-Centered Age.¹¹

Hypotheses H1c, H2c, and H3c were tested using the dependent variable Removal and Services, as they pertain to the likelihood of removal when services are being rendered.¹² The same logistic regression model was used to test all three hypotheses. The model was constructed of three independent variables: Physical Abuse, Mother Perpetrator, and Mother Perpetrator of

⁷ Variable Label: AnyAction

⁸ Variable Labels: PhysAbu, Mom, and MomPhys

⁹ Variable Labels ChPrior, ChildSex, ChldWht, ChildAvgAge, PerpWhite, and PerpAvgAge

¹⁰ Variable Labels: PhysAbu, Mom, and MomPhys

¹¹ Variable Labels: ChPrior, ChildSex, ChildWht ChildAvgAge, PerpWhite, and PerpAvgAge

¹² Var Label: RemServ

Physical Abuse.¹³ In addition to measures of interest, models also controlled for the following measures: Child is Previous Victim, Child Sex, Child is White, Child Mean-Centered Age, Perpetrator is White and Perpetrator Mean-Centered Age.¹⁴

Results

The results section has been divided into five parts. The first section will focus on the descriptive statistics, the second section will discuss and display the correlations table, and the remaining three sections will address each of the research questions and their hypotheses. A total of three models were run to test each of the hypotheses for the three research questions.

Frequencies

The total sample for my study included 23,278 cases (n=23,278). Due to variability in the amount of missing information across variables, the sample size differed across models (all models utilized pairwise deletion for missing cases). In my sample, the majority of children were non-white (52.4%); most cases involved first-time maltreatment victims (58.5%). The average age of the children was 8.69 years old (there was very small difference between male children and female children in average age). Perpetrators were overwhelmingly identified as mothers (88.0%) and the overall average age of perpetrators was 33.37 years. Differences between white and non-white perpetrators were very small (+1.9% white).

My sample of cases included physical abuse-only and neglect-only cases, with an overwhelming majority of the cases involving neglect (86.4%). Mothers were the perpetrators in 92% of all cases involving neglect cases. Physical abuse cases made up the remaining 13.6% of cases in the sample; mothers represented 65% of these perpetrators. According to the data set,

¹³ Variable Labels: PhysAbu, Mom, and MomPhys

¹⁴ Variable Labels ChPrior, ChildSex, ChldWht, ChildAvgAge PerpWhite, and PerpAvgAge

less than half of all substantiated cases in the sample had any action taken (47.2%). Among substantiated cases, 21.5% of cases resulted in a removal. Adoption services were only identified in 2.4% of the cases. It should be noted that the data set lacks any variables that identify a permanency plan by the department or if the child was returned home after the removal. This has important implications and will be addressed further in limitations and avenues for future research.

Table 1: Sample Descriptive Statistics (N=23,278)

Child Characteristics				% (n)	Missing %(n)
	Race/Ethnicity				1.6 (382)
		White		46.0 (10,704)	
		Nonwhite		52.4 (12,192)	
	Gender				.2 (52)
		Male		50.6 (11,784)	
		Female		49.2 (11,442)	
	Age (s.d.)			8.69 (4.80)	
	Prior Victimization				1.3 (312)
		Yes		40.2 (9,358)	
		No		58.5 (13,608)	
Perpetrator Characteristics					
	Race/Ethnicity				4.9 (1,142)
		White		48.5 (11,284)	
		Nonwhite		46.6 (10,852)	
	Gender				
		Male		12.0 (2,791)	
		Female		88.0 (20,487)	
	Age (s.d)			33.37 (8.26)	
Abuse Characteristics					
	Neglect			86.4 (20,111)	
		Mom Perp	92.0 (18,403)		
		Dad Perp	8.0 (1,708)		
	Physical Abuse			13.6 (3,167)	
		Mom Perp	65.0 (2,084)		
		Dad Perp	35.0 (1,083)		
Agency Responses					
	Action Taken			47.2 (10,988)	
	Post Investigation Services			34.8 (8,098)	
	Supportive Services			8.0 (1,857)	
	Removed			21.5 (4,996)	
	Removal and Services			20.0(4,653)	
	Service and No Removal			53.9 (12,557)	
	Adoption			2.4 (566).	

Correlations

A correlation matrix was created to identify any variables that might be so highly correlated that they skewed any analysis. There were only two very high correlations; neither significantly impacted the analyses. First, the correlation between Physical Abuse and Mother Perpetrated Physical Abuse makes sense because large portions of physical abuse cases (65%) are perpetrated by mothers. Second, there was a high, but logical correlation between the race of the perpetrator and the race of the child.

Table 2: Correlations Matrix

		Physical Abuse	Mom	Mother Physical Abuse	Prior Victim	Child Sex	Child is White	Perpetrator is White	Action Taken	Removed	Removal and Services
Physical Abuse	Pearson Correlation	1	-.271	.790	.020	.003	-.047	-.021	.112	.013	.059
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.000	0.000	.001	.305	.000	.001	.000	.027	.000
	N	23278	23278	23278	23278	23226	22896	22136	23278	23278	17210
Mom	Pearson Correlation	-.271	1	.116	-.014	.035	-.046	-.036	-.013	.023	.012
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000		.000	.014	.000	.000	.000	.027	.000	.052
	N	23278	23278	23278	23278	23226	22896	22136	23278	23278	17210
Physical Abuse by Mother	Pearson Correlation	.790	.116	1	.010	.026	-.047	-.028	.111	.029	.075
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	.000		.055	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	23278	23278	23278	23278	23226	22896	22136	23278	23278	17210
Prior Victim	Pearson Correlation	.020	-.014	.010	1	-.010	-.025	-.024	-.028	.000	-.061
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.001	.014	.055		.059	.000	.000	.000	.476	.000
	N	23278	23278	23278	23278	23226	22896	22136	23278	23278	17210
Child Sex	Pearson Correlation	.003	.035	.026	-.010	1	.011	.005	-.002	.003	-.001
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.305	.000	.000	.059		.042	.218	.364	.342	.429
	N	23226	23226	23226	23226	23226	22860	22086	23226	23226	17175
Child is White	Pearson Correlation	-.047	-.046	-.047	-.025	.011	1	.826	.157	.093	.139
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.042		0.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	22896	22896	22896	22896	22860	22896	21919	22896	22896	16976
Perpetrator is White	Pearson Correlation	-.021	-.036	-.028	-.024	.005	.826	1	.144	.087	.124
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000	.218	0.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	22136	22136	22136	22136	22086	21919	22136	22136	22136	16367
Action Taken	Pearson Correlation	.112	-.013	.111	-.028	-.002	.157	.144	1	.553	.960
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.027	.000	.000	.364	.000	.000		0.000	0.000
	N	23278	23278	23278	23278	23226	22896	22136	23278	23278	17210
Removed	Pearson Correlation	.013	.023	.029	.000	.003	.093	.087	.553	1	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.027	.000	.000	.476	.342	.000	.000	0.000		0.000
	N	23278	23278	23278	23278	23226	22896	22136	23278	23278	17210
Removal and Services	Pearson Correlation	.059	.012	.075	-.061	-.001	.139	.124	.960	1.000	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.052	.000	.000	.429	.000	.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	17210	17210	17210	17210	17175	16976	16367	17210	17210	17210

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Research Question 1

Does the type of maltreatment affect agency responses to child maltreatment?

Hypothesis 1a

I began by examining differences in likelihood of receiving some form of service from child welfare agencies after a substantiated maltreatment. I hypothesized that generally physical abuse cases will be viewed as more severe by the child welfare agency and therefore perpetrators will be more likely than neglect perpetrators to receive some form of intervention. Results from logistic regression can be found in Table 3.¹⁵ The relationship between receiving no post investigation intervention and physical abuse perpetrators was found to be significant and consistent with my hypothesis. The odds of receiving services in physical abuse cases are approximately 3 times the odds of being rendered services in cases of neglect. The approximated R-square equivalent for logistic regression (Cox and Snell R Square) suggests that about 10% of the variation in outcome is explained by my model.

Table 3: Logistic Regression of Odds of Some Form of Intervention on Study Predictors (n= 19,740)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp (B)
Physical Abuse	.991	.096	***	2.694
Mom	-.150	.058	**	.861
Mother Perp. Physical Abuse	.384	.113	***	1.468
Prior Victim	-.125	.017	***	.882
Child Sex	-	-	-	-

¹⁵ Full Logistic Regression Models can be found in the Appendix.

Child is White	.384	.054	***	1.468
Child Avg. Age	.073	.004	***	.930
Perp. is White	.308	.054	***	1.361
Perp. Avg. Age	-.015	.002	***	.985
* p < .01 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 - Findings not significant			Cox and Snell Estimate R Squared	.095

Hypotheses 1b

I hypothesized that physical abuse cases would be viewed as more severe and therefore perpetrators of physical abuse would be more likely than perpetrators of neglect to have their child removed. Results from logistic regression Table 4. The relationship removal and physical abuse was not found to be significant.

Table 4: Logistic Regression of Odds of Removal Regardless of Services Based on Study Predictors (n= 19,740)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp (B)
Physical Abuse	-	-	-	-
Mom	-	-	-	-
Mother Perp. Physical Abuse	.347	.129	**	1.415
Prior Victim	-.079	.022	***	.924
Child Sex	-	-	-	-
Child is White	.282	.065	***	1.325
Child Avg. Age	-.062	.005	***	.940
Perp. is White	.206	.066	**	1.228
Perp. Avg. Age	-.007	.003	*	.993
* p < .01 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 - Findings not significant			Cox and Snell Estimate R Squared	.028

Hypothesis 1c

For this hypothesis I predicted that physical abuse will be viewed as more severe by child welfare agencies and therefore perpetrators of physical abuse will be more likely than perpetrators of neglect to have their child removed while receiving services as opposed to being rendered services while maintaining custody of their child. Results from logistic regression can

be found in Table 5. Analysis showed that this relationship was significant and in agreement with my hypothesis. Perpetrators of physical abuse have 1.98 times the odds of perpetrators of neglect to experience removal. According to the Cox and Snell R Square approximately 8% of variance in likelihood of removal is estimated to be as a result of the independent variables in the model.

Table 5: Likelihood of Removal and Services versus In Custody Services Based on Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment Type (n=14,621)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp (B)
Physical Abuse	.684	.130	***	1.983
Mom	-	-	-	-
Mother Perp. Physical Abuse	.542	.150	***	1.720
Prior Victim	-.325	.033	***	.723
Child Sex	-	-	-	-
Child is White	.369	.070	***	1.446
Child Avg. Age	-.088	.005	***	.916
Perp. is White	.274	.070	***	1.315
Perp. Avg. Age	-.013	.003	***	.988
* p < .01 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 - Findings not significant			Cox and Snell Estimate R Squared	.077

Research Question 2

Does perpetrator gender affect agency responses to child maltreatment?

Hypothesis 2a

I predicted that overall mother perpetrators will be more likely than fathers to receive some form of post investigation intervention from child welfare agencies. Results from logistic regression can be found in Table 6. Analysis showed that the relationship between mother perpetrators and likelihood of some form of intervention was significant but not in the predicted direction. Overall, mother perpetrators have a .139 multiplicative decrease in odds of some form of intervention taking place when compared to fathers. According to the Cox and Snell R Square approximately 10% of variance in likelihood of removal is estimated to be as a result of changes to the independent variables in the model.

Table 9: Logistic Regression of Odds of Receiving Intervention on Study Predictors (n=19,740)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp (B)
Physical Abuse	.991	.096	***	2.694
Mom	-.150	.058	**	.861
Mother Perp. Physical Abuse	.384	.113	***	1.468
Prior Victim	-.125	.017	***	.882
Child Sex	-	-	-	-
Child is White	.384	.054	***	1.468
Child Avg. Age	.073	.004	***	.930
Perp. is White	.308	.054	***	1.361
Perp. Avg. Age	-.015	.002	***	.985
* p < .01 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 - Findings not significant			Cox and Snell Estimate R Squared	.095

Hypothesis 2b

I predicted that overall, mother perpetrators will more likely than father perpetrators to have their child removed. Results can be found in Table 7. Analysis showed that the relationship between perpetrator gender and likelihood removal was not significant.

Table 7: Logistic Regression of Odds of Removal on Study Predictors (n=19,740)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp (B)
Physical Abuse	-	-	-	-
Mom	-	-	-	-
Mother Perp. Physical Abuse	.347	.129	**	1.415
Prior Victim	-.079	.022	***	.924
Child Sex	-	-	-	-
Child is White	.282	.065	***	1.325
Child Avg. Age	-.062	.005	***	.940
Perp. is White	.206	.066	**	1.228
Perp. Avg. Age	-.007	.003	*	.993
* p < .01 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 - Findings not significant			Cox and Snell Estimate R Squared	.028

Hypothesis 2c

I predicted that overall mother perpetrators will be more likely than father perpetrators to have their child removed while receiving services as opposed to maintaining custody while rendering services. Results from the analysis can be found in Table 8. Analysis showed that the relationship between perpetrator gender and overall likelihood of a removal and services instead of in-custody services was not significant.

Table 8: Logistic Regression of Odds of Removal-Involved Services (vs In-Custody Services), on Study Predictors (n= 14,621)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp (B)
Physical Abuse	.684	.130	***	1.983
Mom	-	-	-	-
Mother Perp. Physical Abuse	.542	.150	***	1.720
Prior Victim	-.325	.033	***	.723
Child Sex	-	-	-	-
Child is White	.369	.070	***	1.446
Child Avg. Age	-.088	.005	***	.916
Perp. is White	.274	.070	***	1.315
Perp. Avg. Age	-.013	.003	***	.988
* p < .01 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 - Findings not significant			Cox and Snell Estimate R Squared	.077

Research Question 3

Does the interaction of perpetrator gender and maltreatment type affect agency responses to child maltreatment?

Hypothesis 3a

I predicted that mother perpetrators of physical abuse will be the most likely to receive some form of post investigation intervention from a child welfare agency. Results from the logistic regression model can be found in Table 9. Analysis showed that the relationship between likelihood of services and mother perpetrators of physical abuse was significant and in

the predicted direction. Overall, mother perpetrators of physical abuse have a 1.47 multiplicative increase in odds of being having some form on intervention from a child welfare agency than father perpetrators of neglect. Based on the Cox and Snell R Square approximately 10% of the change in likelihood of intervention is estimated to be as a result of changes in the independent variables.

Table 9: Logistic Regression of Odds of Receiving Intervention on Study Predictors, including the Interaction of Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment Type. (n=19,740)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp (B)
Physical Abuse	.991	.096	***	2.694
Mom	-.150	.058	**	.861
Mother Perp. Physical Abuse	.384	.113	***	1.468
Prior Victim	-.125	.017	***	.882
Child Sex	-	-	-	-
Child is White	.384	.054	***	1.468
Child Avg. Age	.073	.004	***	.930
Perp. is White	.308	.054	***	1.361
Perp. Avg. Age	-.015	.002	***	.985
* p < .01 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 - Findings not significant			Cox and Snell Estimate R Squared	.095

Additionally, to clarify the interpretation of findings, I calculated predicted probabilities comparing the likelihood of services being rendered across gender and maltreatment types (with

all other predictors at their reference categories). All of the predicted probabilities can be found in Table 10. Results found the smallest difference between mother and father perpetrators of neglect (.38 vs .42 respectively) in likelihood of some intervention. Importantly, among all cases, mothers in physical abuse cases were the most likely to receive agency intervention of some form. Specifically, controlling for other factors, mothers in a physical abuse cases are 33% more likely than mothers in neglect cases to receive intervention; the difference between fathers in physical abuse versus neglect cases was much smaller (about 24%). Mothers in physical abuse cases are 5% more likely than fathers in abuse cases and 30% more likely than fathers in neglect cases to receive intervention. In physical abuse cases, agencies were only 5% more likely to take action in response to mother perpetrators than fathers, holding all other variables constant. Among neglect cases, agencies were 4% more likely to respond to cases involving fathers than cases involving mothers, controlling for other factors.

Table 10: Probability of Some Intervention Based on Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment Type

Neglect Cases		Odds	Predicted Probabilities
	Fathers	.72	.42
	Mothers	.62	.38
Physical Abuse			
	Fathers	1.94	.66
	Mothers	2.46	.71

Hypothesis 3b

I predicted that mother perpetrators of physical abuse will be the most likely to have their child removed. Results from the logistic regression model can be found in Table 11. Analysis showed that the relationship between mother perpetrators of physical abuse and the likelihood of removal was significant and in accordance with the predicted direction. According to findings, mother perpetrators of physical abuse experience a 1.41 multiplicative increase in odds of removal when compared to father perpetrators of neglect. Based on the Cox and Snell R Square approximately 3% of the change in likelihood of removal is estimated to be as a result of changes in the independent variables.

Table 11: Logistic Regression of Odds of Removal on Study Predictors, including the Interaction of Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment Type (n=19,740)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp (B)
Physical Abuse	-	-	-	-
Mom	-	-	-	-
Mother Perp. Physical Abuse	.347	.129	**	1.415
Prior Victim	-.079	.022	***	.924
Child Sex	-	-	-	-
Child is White	.282	.065	***	1.325
Child Avg. Age	-.062	.005	***	.940
Perp. is White	.206	.066	**	1.228
Perp. Avg. Age	-.007	.003	*	.993
* p < .01 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 - Findings not significant			Cox and Snell Estimate R Squared	.028

Additionally, predicted probabilities were also calculated in order to compare the likelihood removal across gender and maltreatment types. All of the predicted probabilities can be found in Table 12. Results showed only a 1% difference in probabilities between mother and father perpetrators of neglect. Mother perpetrators of physical abuse show a 5% increase in probability having their child removed when compared to father perpetrators of physical abuse.

Mother perpetrators of physical abuse show an 8% increase in likelihood of removal when compared to mother perpetrators of neglect and a 7% increase over father perpetrators of neglect. Mother perpetrators of physical abuse have the highest overall likelihood of removal providing further support for my predictions.

Table 12: Probability of Removal Based on Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment Type

Neglect Cases		Odds	Predicted Probabilities
	Fathers	.22	.18
	Mothers	.20	.17
Physical Abuse			
	Fathers	.25	.20
	Mother	.33	.25

Hypothesis 3c

I predicted overall, mother perpetrators of physical abuse will be the most likely to have their child removed while receiving services as opposed to receiving in custody services. Results from the logistic regression model can be found in Table 13. Analysis showed that the relationship between mother perpetrators of physical abuse and overall likelihood of removal and services versus in custody services to be significant and in the predicted direction. Based on the analysis mother perpetrators of physical abuse experience a 1.72 times increase in odds of removal and services instead of in custody services when compared to father perpetrators of neglect. According to the Cox and Snell R Square approximately 8% of variance in likelihood of removal is estimated to be as a result of the independent variables in the model.

Table 13: Logistic Regression of Odds of Removal-Involved Services (vs In-Custody Services), on Study Predictors, including the Interaction of Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment Type (n= 14,621)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp (B)
Physical Abuse	.684	.130	***	1.983
Mom	-	-	-	-
Mother Perp. Physical Abuse	.542	.150	***	1.720
Prior Victim	-.325	.033	***	.723
Child Sex	-	-	-	-
Child is White	.369	.070	***	1.446
Child Avg. Age	-.088	.005	***	.916
Perp. is White	.274	.070	***	1.315
Perp. Avg. Age	-.013	.003	***	.988
* p < .01 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 - Findings not significant			Cox and Snell Estimate R Squared	.077

Additionally, predicted probabilities were also calculated in order to compare the overall likelihood of removal with services instead of in-custody services for gender and maltreatment types. All of the predicted probabilities can be found in Table 14. Results found only a 3% difference in probabilities between mother and father perpetrators of neglect. Father perpetrators of physical abuse had a 15% increase in probability of removal and services instead of in custody

services when compared to father perpetrators of neglect. Overall mother perpetrators of physical abuse had the highest probability of removal and services instead of in custody services. When services were rendered, mother perpetrators of physical abuse were 26% more likely than father perpetrators of neglect and 29% more likely than mother perpetrators of neglect to have their children removed from the home. When compared to father perpetrators of physical abuse, mother perpetrators of physical abuse were 11% more likely to experience removal-involved services rather than in-custody services. When services were rendered, mother and father perpetrators of neglect had relatively similar likelihoods of removal (26% and 29%, respectively).

Table 14: Probability of Removal-Involved Services versus In Custody Services Based on the Interaction of Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment type

Neglect Cases		Odds	Predicted Probabilities
	Fathers	.40	.29
	Mothers	.36	.26
Physical Abuse			
	Fathers	.80	.44
	Mother	1.21	.55

Discussion

The goal of this study is to expand existing research on gender and deviance from beyond the criminal justice system and into child welfare cases. Specifically, I examined possible relationships between agency responses, parent gender, maltreatment type, and the interaction of parent gender and maltreatment. Three research questions were developed based on existing literature on gender and deviance. While the first two questions (maltreatment type and parent gender) are important, models exploring the interaction of maltreatment type and parent gender yielded particularly interesting findings.

Research Question 1

My initial research question was to identify any differences in agency responses based on maltreatment types. All of my hypotheses predicted that generally physical abuse cases would be viewed as more severe transgressions and therefore be responded to in a more intrusive manner. Hypotheses 1a and 1c were found to be significant. For Hypothesis 1b I predicted that physical abuse perpetrators would be more likely to have their child removed than perpetrators of neglect but logistic regression showed no significant relationship. Upon further examination this could be explained by the lack of control for severity of maltreatment for each case. Analysis for the other two hypotheses provided support for both the significance and direction of my predictions suggesting that generally, physical abuse is viewed as more severe than neglect and therefore more likely to result in a removal.

Research Question 2

This research question sought to explore any differences in agency responses based on the gender of the perpetrator. All of my predictions were based on the idea that mothers would be viewed as more qualified caregivers than fathers and therefore held to a higher standard. Findings for these related hypotheses were not in line with my predictions. Hypothesis 1b was

found to be significant but not in the predicted direction. Based on findings mothers actually experienced a decrease in odds of some form of intervention overall. This once again could be due to lack of controls for the severity of maltreatment. Analysis for Hypothesis 3a does support that mother perpetrators of certain types of maltreatment (physical abuse) do experience increased odds of intervention, which does support partial support for this hypothesis.

Hypotheses 2b and 2c were found not to be significant. As previously mentioned, it appears that differences in agency actions appears to be more correlated with the interaction of perpetrator gender and maltreatment type more than with gender itself.

Research Question 3

While the previous two research questions were necessary to build to this question, I feel that this question provides the most insight to the overall theme of whether or not gender and expected gendered roles affect agency decisions and interventions. Findings for the three hypotheses related to this research question were all supportive of my predictions. Based on both the logistic regression output and the calculated predicted probabilities, mother perpetrators of physical abuse are the most likely to experience some form of intervention from child welfare agencies which supports Hypothesis 3a. I would suggest that child welfare agencies are more likely intervene in these cases for one of two reasons. First, because mothers are often thought to be the ideal caregiver, they may be more likely to receive some form of intervention because they are the ideal placement and therefore agencies want to intervene to keep the placement from completely breaking down. Secondly, I would argue that mother perpetrated physical abuse is the maltreatment most deviant from expected gendered family roles and therefore the most likely to have some form of intervention from a child welfare agency. It is also possible that more

minor cases of neglect do not cause as visceral reactions as physical abuse cases and therefore are less likely to receive any form of post investigation intervention.

Hypothesis 3b found that mother perpetrators of physical abuse were the most likely to have their child removed regardless of whether or not services were rendered. When the idea of expected gendered behaviors is applied these findings are not surprising. Physical abuse perpetrated by a mother is likely to not only be viewed as deviant by childcare standards but also by gendered expectations and therefore considered a case of “double deviance”. Cases viewed as “doubly deviant” are more likely to be seen as severe with more imminent danger for the child, therefore making a removal more necessary. Agencies are more likely to be alarmed by the maltreatment and therefore more inclined to remove the child from the home. Father perpetrators of physical abuse are only slightly more likely to experience a removal than mother or father neglect perpetrators which supports the idea that there is something particularly alarming about mother perpetrated physical abuse cases. This suggests that while child welfare agencies do see physical abuse as deviant, they find it more acceptable when committed by a male, perhaps because it falls more in line with expected gendered behaviors as generally men are held to be more physical and aggressive. It is also possible that male perpetrated physical abuse is related to excessive discipline and therefore not viewed as being as deviant by child welfare agencies. Further research is needed to examine any significance of the relationship between physical abuse as a result of excessive discipline and resulting agency actions.

Hypothesis 3c predicted that when comparing only cases receiving services, mothers would still be the most likely to have their children removed. Every case in this analysis was considered severe enough to warrant intervention beyond the investigation. Findings for this hypothesis were the most stratified. While the logistic regression output was supportive of both

the significance and direction of the relationship, the calculated predicted probabilities did the best job of showing the relationships. The predicted probabilities showed that mother perpetrators of physical abuse experienced no less than an 11 % and as much as a 29% increase in their probability of removal and services instead of in custody services when compared to the other 3 gender and maltreatment type pairs. This provides further support for previously mentioned explanations suggesting expected gendered behavior heavily influences agency decisions. In other words, the idea that failing to meet expected gendered behaviors (being physically domineering/anything other than nurturing to your child as a mother), in combination with violating child welfare guidelines, are violations of double deviance is further supported by the findings in this model. Based on widely held expected gendered behaviors, physical abuse perpetrated by a mother is the most “doubly deviant” act possible in this study.

In sum, I found that while mother perpetrators in general may not experience significant differences when compared to father perpetrators, mother perpetrators of physical abuse experience increased intervention (by quantity and quality) from child welfare agencies across the board. What makes the relationship between the interaction of perpetrator gender and maltreatment type and agency interventions even more interesting is that while gender of the perpetrator was not always found significant by itself, the direction of the relationship was consistently the opposite of the interaction effect (gender and maltreatment type). In other words, in all three models mothers showed a decrease in odds for intervention, by quantity and quality, while mother perpetrators of physical abuse showed an increase in the odds. This difference suggests that something additional influences agency interventions in cases of mother perpetrated physical abuse. I would suggest that while the presence of deviance from child

rearing standards is present in all maltreatment cases, the violation of expected gendered behaviors is the most present in mother perpetrated physical abuse cases.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As in all research, it is important to note some of the limitations and shortcomings of this study. While one of the greatest strengths of the NCANDS data is the information provided from almost every state, this is also perhaps its greatest weakness. The incorporation of data from so many different agencies (and thus, multiple data entry agents) undoubtedly compromises the quality and reliability of the data set. With each state responsible for its own child welfare policies and procedures, discrepancies in the data are not surprising. For example, as mentioned when describing the data, there are different classifications of substantiating cases. For any analysis (such as this study) of agency responses to cases, the lack of universal classifications makes having a reliable starting point difficult. While this study limited its scope by only selecting those cases coded as “substantiated”, a more universal classification scheme would be helpful to ensure that analyses consistently include or exclude only similarly-situated cases across states.

As previously mentioned, some cases were missing values for variables included in the model. Due to time constraints, missing data analyses were not performed and therefore it is unknown if the cases were missing at random or systematically missing. Should the missing cases be determined to be systematically missing it is possible that these cases affected the outcomes of all analyses. Analyses of missing data should be considered for any future study.

This study is also aware that there was no method to account for the severity of maltreatment. In other words, neglect incidents all received the same classification, without

differentiating between mild, moderate, or severe cases. The same problem exists for physical abuse cases. Without some way of distinguishing severity (such as through a Likert scale), there is no way to know the degree to which differences in findings related to maltreatment type, perpetrator gender, or the interaction of maltreatment type and perpetrator gender may be confounded by severity of the abuse. While it is unlikely that all physical abuse perpetrated by a mother is more severe than physical abuse by a father, there is nonetheless no way to control for this possibility.

This study also links micro-level attributions as the theoretical explanation underlying macro-level differences in agency outcomes. While the bridging of this gap was addressed by Ridgeway's theory (2009), I am limited by my inability to actually capture distinct individual-level agent attributions and must infer these from my findings. Further theoretical explorations, the incorporation of micro-level observations, such as the triangulation of data through a mixed methods approach, would enhance any relevant findings.

While NCANDS provides a great deal of information, some additional key information that could help researchers to better utilize the data and allow for more in-depth analyses is lacking. For example, while the dataset does provide information about removal and services, more in-depth time and duration related measures of these services are not available. While the presence of a removal does indicate a moderate to severe intervention by child welfare agencies, further elaboration on the timing or duration of the removal could prove helpful. Some removals may have been very short and others much longer. Knowing the duration of a removal would allow researchers to better determine the severity of the case and the level of cooperation between child welfare agencies and perpetrators. Furthermore, the addition of a Likert scale to

accompany substantiated maltreatment types would help researchers to in both exploring and controlling for the possible effects of severity of maltreatment.

Also, the initial permanency plan of the department is not captured in the dataset. In other words, there is no variable to signify if the department's goal was reunification, adoption, permanent guardianship to a relative, independent living, or some other objective. Some of these goals can be speculated,(but a variable that clearly established the agencies permanency plan would allow for further analyses.

It is important to note that the NCANDS dataset is limited to information reported and recorded within a given fiscal year. That is, there is a great degree of variability across cases with regard to “exposure time,” the duration of a case, it's opportunity for information collection within a given dataset year, and my potential to identify long-term outcomes. Having some additional time-related measures and information regarding the status of the case at the end of the fiscal year (i.e. child still in care, child returned home, child placed with relative, adoption, etc...) would allow for analysis of the likelihood of reunification based on gender, maltreatment type, the interaction of gender and maltreatment type, as well as various other factors. For example, while not all cases would have been begun and completed during the fiscal year, analysis could be run on subsamples restricted to those such cases. Alternatively updated versions of the dataset, including linking case indicators, with subsequent follow-up information could be made available to facilitate comprehensive and or longitudinal analyses.

Additionally future studies could benefit from incorporating elements of intersectionality into the models. In addition to my interaction measures explored here, examinations of how other joint race, class, and/or gender characteristics conditionally influence case outcomes has

the potential to be very insightful. Although the NCANDS dataset does have some such elements, future incorporation of currently unavailable variables (such as income, education levels, and other socioeconomic indicators) could help with further analysis of case outcomes

While the task seems daunting, a mixed methods approach to further examine issues in the gendered social control that is child welfare agencies would make a highly valuable contribution to the literature. A research approach incorporating a triangulation of the large-scale quantitative data (such as NCANDS) with data obtained through qualitative observations and interviews would provide even more in depth analysis of child welfare agency processing and decision-making.

Conclusion

My general goal was to examine potential differences in child welfare agency interventions for maltreatment cases. Specifically, this study examined any potential differences in interventions based on the interaction of perpetrator gender and maltreatment type. While research similar to this has been done on the criminal justice system, this type of analysis appears to be lacking in the realm of child maltreatment cases.

Research questions pertaining to gender and maltreatment type independently of one another showed mixed results in any statistically significant correlations. Despite a lack of control for severity of maltreatment, this study does show reason to believe that physical abuse does increase the chance of intervention and removal in some circumstances. My interaction effect showed support for a significant correlation between removal and gender of the perpetrator. The lack of consistent significant findings for other main effect relationships is

probably largely due to lack of control for severity of the maltreatment. Future research that can control for this confounding factor may reveal even more conclusive findings.

The inclusion of a control variable for severity may influence the significance of maltreatment type and gender. Specifically, incorporating measures of severity may provide further support for the significance of interaction effects in that severity may condition the effect of parent gender on case outcomes to show an even stronger positive effect of parent gender on the likelihood of removal and likelihood of services being rendered among more severe cases. More severe instances of physical abuse may be viewed by agents as more oppositional to expected gendered behaviors. Thus, these acts may be associated with more severe reactions (such as increased likelihood of removal and increased likelihood of services being rendered) from the responding child welfare agency. I also believe that acts of severe neglect may also increase the particularly negative responses to mothers. Similar to physical abuse, severe neglect may exacerbate the likelihood of disproportionately harsh reactions to mothers. These severe acts may reflect the “failures” of mothers to conform to expected gendered behavior, and therefore also result in particularly strong responses from responding child welfare agencies.

This study has some potential implications for policy and practice. Should future research show continued support for my findings, child welfare agencies could attempt to implement both policy and practice changes to combat these unjustified differential outcomes. The inclusion of training exercises for new hires and current workers that call attention to their preconceived expected gendered behaviors and the potential for unfair assessments will help to call attention to and rectify the issues of unjustified gendered effects on the child welfare agency decision making process. One example is to present new hires with a range of vignettes depicting very similar forms of maltreatment and ask them to describe the severity of each case.

The perpetrators of the vignettes will vary between mothers and fathers making a comparison of similar cases between mothers and fathers possible. At the conclusion of the vignettes the workers would then compare their assessments and call attention to differences in response that appear solely based on gender. The implementation of improved training methods in combination with the implementation of more gender neutral assessment tools that quantify behavior in a less subjective way are a start to improving the child welfare decision-making process.

While this study does have some limitations, it does provide significant empirical support to suggest that the interaction of gender and maltreatment type does impact child welfare agency actions. All three logistic regression models showed statistically significant relationships between the interaction effect of mother perpetrators and physical abuse and the likelihood of services being rendered as well as the likelihood of removal. Based on the empirical analysis of this study it appears that mother perpetrated physical abuse stands to garner the most intrusive intervention from child welfare agencies. Future research using less inclusive samples (including multiple more maltreatment types, non-biological caregivers, multiple perpetrators, etc...) should be pursued to further examine these relationships.

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Appendix

Table 14: Logistic Regression of Odds of Receiving Intervention on Study Predictors, including the Interaction of Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment Type. (n=19,740)

Variables In Model	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)
Physical Abuse	.991	.096	.000	2.694
Mother Perpetrator	-.150	.058	.009	.861
Mother Perp. Phys. Abu	.384	.113	.001	1.468
Prior Victim	-.125	.017	.000	.882
Chlld Sex	-.017	.030	.579	.983
Child is White	.384	.054	.000	1.468
Child Avg Age	-.073	.004	.000	.930
Perp. Is White	.308	.054	.000	1.361
Perp Avg. Age	-.015	.002	.000	.985
Constant	-.326	.067	.000	.722

Table 15: Logistic Regression of Odds of Removal on Study Predictors, including the Interaction of Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment Type (n=19,740)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)
Physical Abuse	.146	.113	.198	1.157
Mother Perpetrator	-.056	.070	.424	.945
Mother Perp. Phys. Abu	.347	.129	.007	1.415
Prior Victim	-.079	.022	.000	.924
Chlld Sex	-.041	.036	.255	.959
Child is White	.282	.065	.000	1.325
Child Avg Age	-.062	.005	.000	.940
Perp. Is White	.206	.066	.002	1.228
Perp Avg. Age	-.007	.003	.013	.993
Constant	-1.538	.083	.000	.215

Table 16: Logistic Regression of Odds of Removal-Involved Services (vs In-Custody Services), on Study Predictors, including the Interaction of Perpetrator Gender and Maltreatment Type (n= 14,621)

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)
Physical Abuse	.684	.130	.000	1.983
Mother Perpetrator	-.126	.076	.098	.882
Mother Perp. Phys. Abu	.542	.150	.000	1.720
Prior Victim	-.325	.033	.000	.723
Child Sex	-.020	.040	.615	.980
Child is White	.369	.070	.000	1.446
Child Avg Age	-.088	.005	.000	.916
Perp. Is White	.274	.070	.000	1.315
Perp Avg. Age	-.013	.003	.000	.988
Constant	-.909	.096	.000	.403